IV

A SIX-YEAR VACATION

1868—1874

MY disappearance from the stage must have been a heavy blow to my father and mother, who had urged me to return in 1866 and were quite certain that I had a great future. For the first time for years they had no child in the theatre. Marion and Floss, who were afterward to adopt the stage as a profession, were still at school; Kate had married ; and none of their sons had shown any great aptitude for acting. Fred, who was afterwards to do so well, was at this time hardly out of petticoats.

Perhaps it was because I knew they would oppose me that I left the stage quite quietly and secretly. It seemed to outsiders natural, if regrettable, that I should follow Kate's example. But I was troubling myself little about what people were thinking and saying. " They are saying —what are they saying ? Let them be saying ! "

Then a dreadful thing happened. A body was found in the river—the dead body of a young woman very fair and slight and tall. Every one thought that it was my body.

I had gone away without a word. No one knew where I was. My own father identified the corpse, and Floss and Marion, at their boarding-school, were put into mourning. Then mother went. She kept her head under the shock of the likeness, and bethought her of " a strawberry mark upon my left arm." *(Really I* had one over my left